

**Statement of David J. O'Connor  
Deputy Assistant Administrator for  
Administration and Resources Management  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

**before**

**The Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Reorganization  
of the  
Committee on Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**October 1, 2003**

Madam Chair and Members of the Subcommittee:

Good afternoon, I am David J. O'Connor, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Administration and Resources Management at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I want to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to appear today to discuss our Agency's approach to workforce development and succession planning. Clay Johnson, from the Office of Management and Budget, acknowledged some of the work that EPA has been doing in this area in his testimony before this Subcommittee on September 17, 2003, and in particular our Senior Executive Service Mobility Program.

This program, along with several others that I will address today, grew out of our recognition in the mid to late 90's that we had significant numbers of "Baby Boomers" who would be eligible for retirement at the same time. To prepare for this inevitable loss of highly-skilled and experienced employees, we created an EPA Workforce Development Strategy. The Workforce Development Strategy looked at the Agency's demographics, our mission requirements, needs for succession planning, and potential retirement numbers and laid out a plan for a comprehensive employee development program.

In developing the Strategy, we began by conducting an assessment of the skills and competencies that the Agency would need over the next 20 years to successfully fulfill our mission of protecting public health and the environment. Based on this assessment, we created a series of programs to provide: administrative employees with a range of developmental experiences under the “New Skills/New Options” program; a mid-level development program for our professional, scientific and technical non-managerial staff; and a series of developmental programs for all levels of management.

The EPA Intern Program has been one of our most successful efforts in attracting new talent to the Agency. This entry level, permanent employment and career development program has resulted in the hiring of 191 interns over the past six years, 45% of whom are minorities or individuals with disabilities. This year alone, 1843 applications were received; 438 applicants were qualified for the 39 positions, which gives some indication of the program’s success, and also the high interest in working for EPA. With a retention rate of 90%, the EPA Intern Program has been a wonderful addition to our hiring program.

EPA recognizes the importance of attracting and retaining qualified leaders. In 2002, the Agency initiated a Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Program that identified more than 650 applicants from across the Federal government. Of these, 51 were selected to participate in a rigorous eighteen month development program consisting of rotations, leadership training and mentorship. To date, four candidates have been selected for SES positions, two are pending placement and six have been certified by OPM and waiting for an SES position selection.

As we began to focus on the many impending retirements that would be occurring in our management ranks, we also realized that many of the Agency’s SES employees had remained in

their positions for years, some for decades. So in November 2001, the Agency formally initiated an SES Mobility Program to revitalize and strengthen the Agency's programs and the senior leadership team. The primary purpose of the mobility program is to assure that the Agency's senior leaders have a wide-ranging set of skills, and the expertise to react to continuous change while still achieving solid results. At EPA, we depend on our senior executives to have the ability to steer the helm of any organization, to exhibit the flexibility needed to maneuver successfully from one challenge to the next. Over 250 positions/employees were identified for potential reassignments. Of these, 71 SES managers have moved to other SES positions within the EPA. In addition to executive career growth, there is a strong business reason for mobility - EPA's critical need to deal with cross-agency and integrated environmental issues grows greater every day; therefore, it is incumbent on Agency leadership to ensure that senior executives are equipped to address new and emerging issues as well as broad-based challenges.

The implementation and success of these workforce development initiatives has not eliminated the continuing challenge of making progress in achieving the President's Management Agenda for the Strategic Management of Human Capital. In the past two years, EPA has worked diligently to ensure that the optimum level of resources and attention is devoted to our Human Capital initiatives. We have appointed a Human Capital Coordinator to lead our efforts, re-aligned our human resources staff, and created a Human Capital Strategy Implementation Group charged with coordinating the development and implementation of our Human Capital Strategy once we complete revision.

We are developing a Human Capital Accountability Plan to set out the methodologies and the people responsible for monitoring progress in implementing our many human capital initiatives, and for tying accomplishments in the Human Capital arena to overall mission results.

We are moving towards addressing the need for greater accountability by better

integrating EPA's human resources systems with the budget and planning process. All of these efforts have positioned the Agency to more effectively achieve our Human Capital goals.

We are currently conducting program evaluations of many of our workforce development programs such as the EPA Intern Program, the Candidate Development Program, and the SES Mobility Program to confirm that we are on target and to identify opportunities for improvement. Like our SES Mobility Program, we want to remain flexible and vigilant for new opportunities to address the Agency's evolving workforce needs.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to address you today. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.